THE MURDER IN THE RUE DE GAIETE. (See front page.)

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 318. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 2, 1895. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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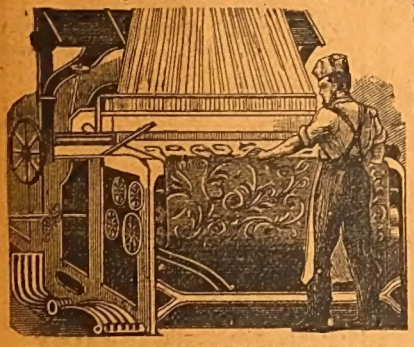

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 318.] *FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 2, 1895.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

THE MVRDER IN THE RVE de GAIETE.

CHAPTER I.

IN the year 18—— I obtained my degree of medicine in the University of London. My late hard studies had seriously injured my health, and taking the advice of friends I started on a Continental tour, in the hope that a change of life and scene might thoroughly recruit my shattered constitution.

In the course of travel I at length found myself in Paris, that gay city where life seems to be spent in one eternal whirl of pleasure. Naturally of a reserved and retiring disposition, I found little pleasure in the class of amusement that commends itself to most men.

One evening, after I had been located in Paris only a few weeks, I found that in pursuit of my favourite exercise I had wandered further from the city than had been my original intention. It was now quite dark, and I prepared at once to retrace my steps.

To my consternation I discovered that my mind had been so occupied with problems and theories in connection with my medical studies that I had entirely neglected to observe the route I had taken—in a word, I had lost my way.

At length, confused and bewildered, I came to a dead halt. At that moment the sound of a horse champing its bit fell on my ear. Guiding myself as best I could in the direction from whence the sound came, I suddenly came violently in contact with some dark object standing in the roadway.

Before I had time to recover from the shock a bright light flashed upon the spot where I stood, and I became aware that I was in the immediate vicinity of a palatial dwelling, one of the windows of which had that instant been illumined.

For some few seconds my eyes were rendered useless owing to the sudden transition from darkness to light. At length I was able to perceive that I was standing within a few inches of a horse, secured by its head to a light wooden paling surrounding the house.

I was just beginning to conjecture what could be the reason for the animal being left in this strange position, made more unaccountable by the fact of its owner not being present, when a low, grating sound, as of a window being softly drawn up, fell upon my ear. The next moment a suppressed cry of terror and alarm in a woman's voice broke the death-like silence, and the figure of a man was thrown on the blind of the window, from where the bright light shone.

An indescribable feeling of terror crept over me. There was no mistaking the meaning of that terrible cry. It was the cry of a human being in all the agony of hopeless despair. An irresistible impulse seized me. Climbing the low wooden fence I reached the building. A large peach tree, with spreading branches, was trained against the outside wall. By its friendly aid I soon reached the window, and what a scene met my view! Through a chink in the blind I saw the interior of the room distinctly. It was brilliantly lighted; only two persons were in it, a tall powerfully-built man, and a woman. The man had his back to me.

The murderer's right hand was raised.

The young girl was dressed in full evening costume; she had her face towards me; she was fast losing consciousness, her swollen, discoloured face, with its starting eyeballs, told me that. The murderer had his left hand on her throat. He was choking her. The struggle had evidently been a severe one, for the victim's dress was disarranged and torn, and her long golden hair had burst from its fastenings, and had fallen in disordered masses over her shoulders and bosom. The murderer's right hand was raised. In it he held a long dagger or knife. With one rapid movement it descended and, with a heavy gasping sigh, the girl sank lifeless on the floor.

I was petrified with horror. I seemed to be in a dream, and yet not dreaming. The horror of the scene I had witnessed froze the very blood in my veins. The power of speech, the power of reason, the power of preventing the fell work, all alike seemed taken from me. How I had presence of mind to retain my hold in the dangerous position in which I was placed I know not. I tried to scream for assistance, but my

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lips refused to give utterance to the slightest sound. I was fascinated with terror; my eyes were riveted on the terrible scene before me. The murderer stood motionless, gazing at his victim. A revulsion of feeling seemed suddenly to overwhelm him.

Throwing himself on the bleeding form of the young girl, he frantically kissed the cold lips of the corpse. Suddenly he started to his feet. The sound of approaching footsteps had alarmed him. He turned and saw my face at the window. With a hoarse cry he crossed the room and made his escape from the scene of his crime by an open window opposite, and was lost to my view in the dark shadows outside.

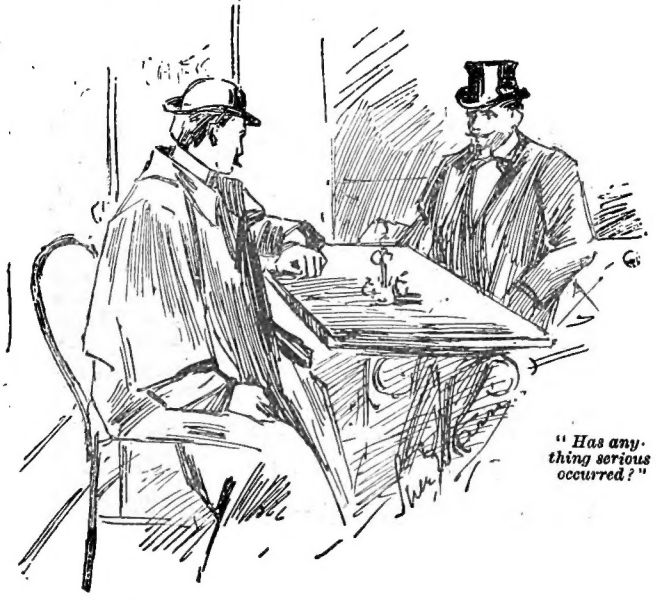
The natural instinct of self-preservation came strong upon me. I became aware of the peril in which I was placed. The risk I ran of being thought the perpetrator of a murder were I discovered in my present position. My imperfect acquaintance with the language of the country would make it utterly impossible for me to coherently relate, with any prospect of credence being given to my story, what I had just seen, and my present state of excitement would further increase the suspicion that would be sure to attach itself to me.

With a violent effort I freed myself from the chains of terror that bound me. As I reached the ground I heard a horse's hoofs clattering on the dark road, the sound gradually growing fainter and fainter, till at length it died away in the distance. I was haunted by the face of the murdered girl; every nook and corner seemed to contain her bleeding form.

In the excited state of my nerves the terrible scene I had witnessed was constantly before me. At length the moon rose, and by her pale blue light I was enabled to reach my home. I flung myself on a couch, where, with broken slumbers and horrible dreams, I wearily longed for the blessed light of day.

Next morning my memory vividly retained the events of the previous night. I was undecided what course to pursue. At first I thought of acquainting the authorities of what I had witnessed. The fear of being arrested myself for the crime deterred me, for I had enough knowledge of police procedure to be aware that, though the fact of my being in that locality could innocently enough be explained, the very simplicity of my story would in all likelihood make it the more difficult to be believed by men who, by reason of their vocation, had to deal with those whose every word was a lie, and every thought a crime.

Ultimately I decided on saying nothing about the matter till at least I heard whether the murderer had been captured or not. With this resolve I descended to the street, and soon found myself in a neighbouring *café*, which, as usual, was crowded with customers busily engaged in discussing the contents of the morning papers.



"Has anything serious occurred?"

I have said before that my knowledge of the French language was very limited, and, owing to the rapid manner in which my companions conversed, I found myself utterly unable to understand their remarks, but I could easily see from their excited gestures that something of unusual interest was the topic of conversation.

"Has anything serious occurred?" I asked of a man who sat at one of the tables, forgetting for the moment that it was possible he might not understand me.

The man looked at me for a few moments in astonishment, and then replied in broken English: "Has Monsieur not seen the papers? Has he not heard the terrible news?"

I answered in the negative.

"The Marchioness de C—— was murdered last night in her own house in the Rue de Gaieté."

The man must have noticed my excitement, for he immediately added:

"I see Monsieur is horrified. Choked first, Monsieur, then stabbed to the heart. The lovely Marchioness, who had the whole of Paris at her feet. Mon Dieu! what an end. It is ten thousand pities, Monsieur."

"And who committed this foul murder?" I asked.

"That is the question everyone is asking, Monsieur. No one saw the murder committed. The Marchioness was at an evening party last night, and, saying she felt unwell, left earlier than usual. She would not allow the Marquis to accompany her. The footman who opened the door when she arrived home says she looked flushed and excited. She retired at once to her private apartment alone.

"What occurred after no one knows, Monsieur. The Marquis, feeling anxious about his lady, left the party almost immediately after her. When he reached home he went straight to his wife's room, and, to his horror, found her lying on the floor in a pool of blood, dead.

"One of the windows in the room was wide open, but they say, Monsieur, that the murderer must have entered the room by the other window, for the great peach tree growing on the wall has many of its branches broken, as if someone had climbed up it, and there are marks of horse's hoofs on the road outside." The Frenchman stopped abruptly to sip his coffee.

"And—and," I stammered, scarcely knowing what I said, "have they discovered what was the reason for committing the murder?"

"That is the greatest mystery of all, Monsieur. Though the Marchioness was wearing thousands of francs' worth of jewellery, not so much as a ring was touched. It is whispered, Monsieur," lowering his voice as he spoke, "that the Marquis murdered his wife himself. He was terribly jealous of her. She was only a poor farmer's daughter in one of the Provinces when he married her. Such marriages seldom bring happiness with them, Monsieur."

"Describe her husband, the Marquis, to me," I eagerly demanded.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"Surely Monsieur has not lived long in Paris, or he would know the Marquis de C——."

"Is he a tall, handsome man?" I inquired.

"Monsieur is surely joking. Would he call a hunchback, scarcely higher than this table, a tall man? No, Monsieur. If the husband had been murdered Paris would not have deplored it much; but to lose the loveliest of her women, it is hard to bear."

With this remark the little Frenchman lit his cigarette, and, bidding me good morning, left me.

And as I had been the solitary spectator of this mysterious crime, I felt thankful now that I had not divulged the secret, for I plainly saw that suspicion, made doubly strong by the fact of my being a foreigner, would have surely attached itself to me.

Paris had no attraction to me now. Next day I left the city.

CHAPTER II.

THE older a man becomes the faster do the years speed over his head, and I can scarcely bring myself to believe that ten years have elapsed since the events narrated in the preceding chapter occurred. It is long since I abandoned the medical

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profession; I soon found I could never hope to climb the ladder of fame by its aid.

My reserved manner made me little adapted to succeed in a walk of life where so much depends upon suavity and cheerfulness of disposition. I have devoted myself entirely to literary pursuits.

The efforts of my pen have been received with approbation by critics and public alike, and people point to me as being one of the most successful authors of the age.

I do not keep much company, though, Heaven knows, every post brings me invitations to all sorts of entertainments. I have only one friend, and he comes up to see me sometimes in my quiet apartment. He is manager of a well-known metropolitan theatre, and is a little, stout, cheery, chatty fellow, who seems to go through life with an eternal halo of sunshine around him.

One evening the conversation fell on the merits and demerits of a play creating a great sensation just then. After my friend left me, a sudden thought struck me: should I not write a drama myself? The more I considered the matter the more feasible the project appeared.

The long-forgotten murder in the Rue de Gaieté came vividly to my memory. Why not found my plot on it? I set my imaginative faculties to work, and some weeks later, when the drama was finished, I placed it in my friend's hand for his perusal. To my great satisfaction the play met with his utmost approval. "The white face at the window watching the mysterious murderer at his foul work is terribly sensational," he said. "How ever did you think of that?"

I told him what I had seen that night at the Rue de Gaieté.

"And the rest of the story is what you imagine would impel a man to commit such a crime. Quite likely; these Frenchmen are terrible fiends when their jealousy is aroused. Who are we to get to play the murderer? There's a man who joined my company a short time ago; from what I have seen of his acting I believe he would play the part to perfection. He speaks with a slightly foreign accent—all the better; it will make the character he depicts the more realistic."

After some further conversation my friend bid me good night and, departing, left me alone.

To my great disappointment I was unable to attend the rehearsals of my drama. A violent attack of rheumatism, an illness to which I was subject, confined me to my room. Days passed on, and to my satisfaction I found myself sufficiently recovered to be able to appear on the first night of the production of the play.

The large building was crowded to excess when I took my seat in the private box set apart for me. All the wealth, beauty, and talent of the great metropolis was there. The fact of the new drama being the work of an author who had already achieved success in a different branch of literature made it doubly attractive.

The overture is played, and the curtain rises slowly on the first act. As I sat in my box watching the development of the play, the whole of my attention was naturally concentrated on the actor who played the leading part, and on whom so much depended. He was a tall, powerfully-built, swarthy-complexioned man. To my astonishment he seemed strangely nervous and excited. His face was as pale as that of a corpse; he seemed to be labouring under some intense excitement; for, on more than one occasion, he passed his hand across his forehead as if with difficulty he was enabled to carry on his part.

Annoyed at the man's apathy, the audience showed distinct signs of disapprobation. Inwardly I cursed the stupidity of a manager who placed such an important part in the hands of a man utterly unfit to do it justice.

Of a sudden, the man's whole manner changed. With a violent effort he gained control over himself. The last scene in the first act was reached, and the culminating point in the drama approaches. Again I see the brilliantly lit room with the young girl in it; again I see the murderer approach her with stealthy cat-like stride; again I see the terrible struggle for life; again that wild cry rings in my ears, and I see, as I saw it years before, in all its terrible reality, the white, hopeless, despairing face of the terror-stricken girl.

Paralysed with terror, and for the moment forgetting entirely where I was, with a hoarse cry I sprang to my feet. The murderer turned, and saw my startled livid face. With a wild unearthly scream he raised his hands above his head, and fell with a heavy crash unconscious on the floor. The terrible truth flashed upon me now: he had been depicting the tragedy of his own life

"What spirit of darkness tempted you to write that play?"

The spectators, suddenly awakened from the spell that bound them, applauded vociferously; a dark coloured liquid trickled from the lips of the unconscious man; figures rushed from the wings to his assistance, and the curtain fell rapidly.

Something terrible had occurred, and the crowd conversed together in awe-stricken tones as they slowly left the theatre. I sat as if in a trance, speechless and motionless. A hand was suddenly placed on my shoulder. I turned and saw the face of my friend the manager.

Mechanically I rose and followed him. With all the tinsel and mockery of pleasure round him there, on a rude bed, the sufferer lay, with the clotted blood on his white lips.

"Monsieur," he muttered hoarsely, "they tell me you are the author of that play. You have written the secret of my life. For ten long years I have struggled to forget the past, but without avail. I am haunted by the face of that murdered girl. Even now," he continued wildly, "I see it as plainly as I saw it on that night of horror. God knows how I loved her. An irresistible fascination compelled me to play that part. It was the retribution of Heaven."

Suddenly he started, and with a violent effort he raised himself on his elbow.

"What spirit of darkness tempted you to write that play?" he asked fiercely.

"I saw the murder committed," I answered simply.

A terrible look passed over the dying man's face, and then he fell back. God had punished him—he was dead!

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A GIRL OF SPIRIT

CHAPTER I.

"OH, will you actually be too busy, Dick, to run down to Brighton except for an occasional Sunday or so?"

Dick Stevens, who had just entered on the practice of law, failed to meet the wistful gaze of his *fiancée* as he admitted the fact of several very important cases claiming his time and attention just then.

"But you will be a sensible girl, Marie," he added. "Don't deprive yourself of enjoyment simply because I'm not there to share it with you."

"But, Dick!" tears standing in her lovely eyes, "how lonely you will be when every one is out of town!"

Dick assented with a sigh: "Time will drag of course," he said, "but the thought of seeing you at intervals will shorten anything."

Dear Richard! How unworthy Marie felt herself as the chosen companion of such a man; a man who for duty's sake could forego the delights of Brighton, and—yes—with a blush—of her society; Richard, whose every want and desire was met and gratified by a father at once rich, proud and doting.

CHAPTER II.

It was a callow youth who, a few weeks later at Brighton, sought to entertain the distrait Miss Collinson with bits of London gossip.

"Weally, now," he was saying, "the chappies who stay in town duwin' the summer have the best of it, you know, they weally do. Your sympathies are quite thrown away, Miss Collinson, they weally are."

The look of sudden interest in his listener's eyes quite staggered the youth.

"Ah!" said she, incredulously, "how can that be, Mr Sap? Business, I should think, would be——".

"Business!" as she paused, "why it's not much business the chappies of our set do, Miss Collinson, at any time, don'cher know. Oh, no, the fellahs, you see, have learned a thing or two, they have," and Mr. Sap chuckled.

"Now there's Dick Stevens, for instance," delighted at the interest he had inspired; "you know Dick, perhaps, Miss Collinson."

"Slightly," dropping her eyes.

"Well, he's just having a high old time, a high old time, don'cher know."

"Yes?" coldly, "and what constitutes a high old time in your estimation, may I ask?"

"Why, when a feller has the exclusive right to the company of the werry prettiest girl in the Folly Opera Company, and attends the races, and gives wine suppers and goes a-yachting; and time can't go slow with Dick Stevens, Miss Collinson, it weally can't, don'cher know."

"I should think not," quietly said Marie, rising to depart; "but—but you are quite sure—about—about the girl of the Folly Opera Company, are you not?"

"Oh, quite," wondering a little at her interest upon that point. "It's the talk of all the fellahs about town;" and not until the following day did the callow youth know the mischief he had wrought in that one brief hour under the stars.

Wounded affection, outraged pride! With both had Marie to battle the long night through. Letter after letter did she write only to destroy. Too bitter the reproaches in one, too tender the chidings in another, the marks of tears upon all.

"I will wait until morning," she decided at last, wearily; "perhaps the—but, oh, Dick, Dick, can I ever forget you?"

CHAPTER III.

A rather *blasé* individual a few days later received at his club in Piccadilly a letter which both surprised and amused him.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed with a hearty laugh, "my niece Marie is a girl of spirit, and wonderfully clever. Let me see," re-reading the letter, "if the thing is quite feasible. I think it is; indeed," after reflection, "I will make it so," and before many hours Marie had received from her uncle a telegram which brought her at once to town.

The next evening, in the most bewitching costume conceivable, Dick's *fiancée*, accompanied by several men, appeared in a box at the Opera.

An unmistakable constraint sat upon the party. Two of the men cast from time to time embarrassed glances upon their pretty but silent companion. But once did she unclose her lips, and then only to question the man who sat well back among the shadows.

"Rest easy," he answered. "He will be here. I had the assurance from him but an hour ago. Ah, there he is now."

Marie Collinson cast one quick glance at the party entering the opposite box, then fell to chattering in the most animated manner with the man beside her.

Dick Stevens, with complacent smile on his handsome face, seated himself well in view of the audience by the side of a petite blonde, highly rouged and conspicuously attired, while the friend of his bosom hung over the chair of a brunette of similar description.

"Why," exclaimed the blonde catching a glimpse of Dick's eyes fixed in smouldering wrath upon the occupant of the box opposite, "whatever is the matter with you?"

"Who is that girl?" drawled the brunette, levelling her glass at Miss Collinson. "Whoever she is she's a stunner."

Dick's friend looked at him in dismay.

"Why, it's——" he began, but Dick stopped him with a quick gesture.

"You know the men, Griswold?" he inquired hoarsely, rising from his chair.

"Of course," replied the other, in some embarrassment, "who does not?"

Dick grew white to the lips.

"I will be back shortly," he said to the blonde, and with a curt nod strode from the box.

Smiling and placid, Marie, a few minutes later, gazed into his angry eyes.

"Permit me," with great empressement, "to introduce you, Mr. Stevens, to my friends Mr. Box and Mr. Game."

"Glad to meet you," awkwardly said those men, each extending a hand.

The look which sprang into Mr. Box's eyes as Dick ignored their salutations brought a smile to the lips of Marie.

"Will you not take a seat?" she said sweetly, as Dick stationed himself beside her chair.

"Not in such company," he whispered angrily.

For answer Miss Collinson levelled her glass upon the occupants of the opposite box.

"Who is your companion, the pretty blonde?" she inquired calmly.

Dick muttered something, whether an imprecation or a name Marie failed to distinguish.

"And who are your companions?" he retorted, glowering upon Mr. Box and Mr. Game.

"I introduced you to them. Have you so soon forgotten?" demurely.

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"Yes, yes; but their characters I mean, Marie. Do you know their characters?"

"Why, no," reflectively. "How can a woman know the true character of any man, Mr. Stevens, even after months of companionship?"

Dick reddened.

"Well, their occupation, then?" less savagely.

"Yes," innocently, "they are professional men. Business detains them in town during the heated term, too, poor things."

Dick's hand trembled as he laid it gently upon her shoulder.

"Come," he said, huskily, "come, Marie! Let us leave the theatre."

"But the blonde across the way," coldly. "Surely you will lose her favour should you desert her thus?"

For one instant Dick Stevens wavered—for one instant—and then he said, his eyes fixed unwaveringly upon hers:

"Come, Marie! There is but one woman in the world or me. Come."

With a flash of triumph in her eyes, Miss Collinson arose.

"Good-night," coldly, to her abashed companions, "good-night," and without further ceremony she turned to leave the box.

"Ah!" said Dick, as the figure in the back ground came into view, "so, Marie was not left to—to——"

"The tender mercies of a middle-weight prize-fighter and a notorious gambler, eh?" finished her uncle, with a laugh. "No, no, my dear boy; not so bad as that, though it must have been a bitter pill to swallow to see your *fiancée* in such company. Still——"

A soft hand over the speaker's mouth put an end to the sentence.

Dick, they say, is on probation. How true it is I do not know, but the fact of the wedding being indefinitely postponed seems to lend an air of truth to the rumour.

TO THE BITTER END

ANTONIO FORLI was certainly dying. The sweat on his face and the difficult breathing told of it quite as much as the prayers of the priest, who every now and then came to a pause and lowered his head so that he could look over his spectacles at the sick man.

Forli's wife and his son Cesare were also in the darkened room.

The former's sobs were continuous. She was on her knees by her husband's bedside, holding the crucifix as the priest had directed her, and at each pause in his reverence's petitions she broke out into ejaculations of startling energy. One of her cries seemed to bring sudden vitality into the sallow, pinched face of the dying man.

"By the Virgin and San Antonio," she screamed, "have we not suffered enough wrong—we Forli? Let there be a blood reckoning between the Leonetti and us. Oh, my poor, handsome husband, see to it when thou art in Paradise!"

"Chut, chut!" interrupted the priest quickly. "Remember, woman, that he has been anointed. The time for such thoughts has passed."

But Antonio himself did not seem to think so. Resting himself up so that his back leaned against the wall, he opened his mouth as if to speak, and waved a weak hand toward his son Cesare.

"Come to thy father, son," said the woman with apparent acerbity.

Cesare Forli was but sixteen, though he had the muscles and stature of a man, and also the firm expression of a man on his dark face. He was Corsican to the toe tips.

Again the priest tried to interfere.

"The Holy Mother," he exclaimed, "likes not such compacts. Be advised. Let earthly dissensions be forgotten, and give thyself wholly to God."

"May I be forgotten of God if I do," said the sick man in a cavernous voice that sounded very grim. There was a flash in his dark eyes as he spoke. Then he turned to his son.

"I am going," he said, and it was as if he pitied himself. His wife's moans broke out afresh. "I am going, my son; but there is work for thee. Speed to the Sartene province of Corsica—ah! the dear land. I die exiled from it—and there kill first Giovanni Leonetti. Shoot him in the back as he shot thy dear brother who is in heaven. And afterwards kill all the other Leonetti in the land—like rats."

"I command you!" cried the priest. "This is infamy!"

But the dying man's voice rose above the priest's:

"It is not infamy; it is duty. See to it, Cesare. Place thy hand on my breast—ah!"

He slid down into the bed again and lay gasping. The lad, without moving a muscle of his countenance, did as his father bade him, and stood watching the struggle on his father's face.

"He is going," whispered the priest to the woman.

The latter rose to clasp her husband once more in her arms, but with a final effort the exile opened his mouth to speak:

"Swear," he sobbed, staring at the lad; "swear, or I——."

He could not finish. Even while Cesare was murmuring the words, "I swear it, father," with his right hand still on his father's breast, the man's jaws slipped and his eyes lost their life.

"It is a pity," said the priest, as he drew near, "men cannot be sensible in their last moments. But there, it is breath wasted to reproach him now; you Corsicans are all alike. Cesare, I absolve you from your bond to your poor father."

The lad lifted his eyes to the priest, but said nothing.

"Promises of so sacrilegious a kind, extorted by the dying, are not to be kept. In fulfilling them you do but protract his presence in purgatory. Dost hear me, my son?"

But the woman herself responded. She turned an inflamed face upon the priest.

"Father Correggio," she said, with terrible earnestness, "may the boy rot in this world and the next for ever if he forgets his oath! The living as well as the dead bind him."

The priest shrugged his shoulders, folded his spectacles, put his breviary in his pocket, shook his skirts to make sure they hung freely, shuffled to the corpse and made the sign of the cross on his forehead—with a protesting movement of his own head the while—and then murmuring "Benedicita!" left the room.

"They are fiends, these Corsicans!" the good father said to himself as he crossed the threshold.

II.

Barely a month later young Cesare was in Corsica with his gun. His was a pitiful errand, but he did not seem to think so; neither did his mother who, from the mainland, sent prayers

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and blessings in his wake, and confidently awaited his return with the blood of the clan of the Leonetti on his immature young hands.

In Bastia the lad bought black clothes like the native Corsicans; they went well with his set countenance and fierce eyes. His gun was his father's. It was old, but he believed it would do his work. It had shot men ere this. The experience might be of service to it and Cesare himself.

And so from Bastia Cesare walked down the coast line to the South, by the vineyards and through the orange groves of many a fertile though rather pestilential little village. He had nothing to do till he got to Portio Vecchio. For a week he could live the life of an honest man, enjoying the good gifts of sunshine and bewitching landscapes without either remorse or forebodings.

From Porto Vecchio he was to strike into the mountains and lay his snares for the Leonetti, who had their dwellings among the sources of the Stabiaccio.

It was a happy week, this that he spent between the mountains and the blue sea. But at the sight of the walls of Porto Vecchio he remembered his responsibilities to the uttermost.

Yet another brief respite was allowed him, however.

At the inn where he stayed was a lovely young girl named Caterina. She could not have been more than fifteen, though her large, sombre, blue eyes had a woman's expression. The twain soon made acquaintance. The girl's mother was fascinated by Cesare's looks, and would fain have learned all about him. But, of course, that was impossible. Nevertheless, the three days the lad spent in this ancient town were enough for both Cesare and Caterina.

"I will come back for you, my angel," said the lad, when on the fourth morning he had shouldered his gun and prepared for his hideous undertaking. "Be true to me."

The girl's eyes answered him sufficiently. But her tongue also bore witness for her.

"Thou hast all my heart, dear Cesare," she whispered.

From early morning until late in the afternoon, the lad clambered among the oaks and precipices, wondering how his task would come to him. He was bound for a village high up. Here he meant to mature his plans in the very midst of the Leonetti he had come to destroy.

But when it was near sun-down he fell in with a young man hardly older than himself, whose vivacity and gift of persuasion had a strange power over him.

"I am bent on a dark business," he told Cesare. "'Tis no less than bloodshed. We are in vendetta. Wilt join me?"

Cesare looked thunderstruck.

"I, too, am here in vendetta," he stammered out.

"Good! Then let us take an oath of friendship. You will help me this afternoon, and then I will do for you what you do for me."

"What is the name of the doomed one?" asked Cesare.

"That," replied the other, "I do not tell thee. Neither am I inquisitive about thy quarrel."

Then the thought flashed to Cesare's mind that it was Leonetti who was being pursued.

"I am thine," he said, offering his hand.

"And I thine," said the other, and they swore an oath in the matter.

This done, at the bidding of his friend, who said he might be called Carlo, Cesare loaded his gun afresh. Together they then stole by a scraggy path towards a highland glen, or, rather, basin, occupied entirely by a mountain torrent, a few pine trees, innumerable boulders, and a single black-browed hut.

"He has been away a long time," whispered Carlo, "perhaps he thinks he is forgotten. Ah! he shall be taught differently."

It was arranged that, having crept as near as possible to the house in the dusk, they should lie concealed behind the rocks until the man came out or showed in his doorway.

The plan worked only too well.

In less than a quarter of an hour a tall, broad-shouldered man opened the door to look forth.

"It is he," whispered Carlo. "Shoot!"

The victim dropped on the threshold. The two young men did not wait to hear more than one cry from the woman who rushed to the stricken man. They hurried down and down, and drew breath only when they were near the village of Carlo's home.

Here, when the houses showed, Cesare put the question that had of late hovered on his lips:

"Was he a Leonetti?"

The other laughed as he replied:

"Mother of God, no! I am a Leonetti! He was a Forli—the last of them in Corsica!"

Cesare was like to faint at first. He had not been bred in Corsica, and was unused to such shocks. Then he grasped his gun, and, looking Carlo in the face, said:

"I, too, am a Forli."

But Carlo, uplifting his gun, shouted:

"Remember our bond—we are friends. I have sworn and you have sworn."

Cesare yielded to the persuasion.

"It is terrible!" he muttered.

Nevertheless he consented to go home with Carlo, who gave him the name of Pinello to make it possible for him to receive the hospitality of the family.

III.

Giovanni Leonetti lived in the village. He was uncle to Carlo, and a stalwart Corsican to boot. He never moved five steps from his house without his gun—loaded.

Cesare slept little his first night in the very thick of the Corsican feuds. He was thinking of his father, of Caterina, of the man he had shot—his own father's half-brother, as it turned out—and of the vengeance he would sooner or later wreak on young Carlo.

But Giovanni Leonetti was to die first. His mother had told him why, ere he left the mainland. The man had shot her first-born, Angelo, when he was a pretty boy of eight—had shot him as you or I would shoot a partridge. It was not, of course, from personal enmity, but merely in perpetuation of the traditional feud. Immediately afterwards, the police had taken Antonio Forli. Antonio had shot two of them in his successful attempt to escape. And then he and his wife and the little Cesare had evaded the island.

The little Angelo remained unrevenged.

Giovanni Leonetti came and stared at Cesare.

"What is thy business in the mountains?" he asked. Something in the lad's face made him uneasy.

"He has none, uncle," said Carlo, answering for him. "He was lost, and he did us a service in helping to finish off Giacomo Forli."

"Good! Then we are friends," replied Giovanni. But if he could have seen the hungry look in Cesare's eyes when he turned to go he would have amended his words.

"Be patient," said young Carlo to Cesare; "you have bound me to aid you, I will do it. The afterward shall take care of itself. Only tarry till his granddaughter comes from the town. Let him see her; they are so fond of each other. Between ourselves, Cesare, I love that girl; but she loves not me, though perhaps she will do it. Let him see her once more and then we will decide it. There is the family feud, and there is the personal bond. The latter is stronger with the individual, the former with the clan. I would, however, we had never met."

"And I," said Cesare. The lad was perplexed. There were times when his hot blood urged him to take Carlo's life at once. And again there were times when he sobbed to himself that it was impossible he could kill his companion.

For three days this strange life went on. On the fourth day, at noon, when Cesare came in from the mountains, whither he had been roaming with his wild thoughts, Carlo told him the news.

"She has arrived."

"Who?" asked the other.

"Come and see," said Carlo.

They crossed the green village square, with the great

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chestnut tree growing in its midst, and approached Giovanni Leonetti's house. Then they entered.

"Good day, *cara mia*," exclaimed Carlo.

The girl he addressed turned, and Cesare stepped backward with a thumping heart.

"Caterina!" he exclaimed, involuntarily.

It was she, sure enough. But, though she was at first confused, she had the tact of her sex, and it was not difficult for her to explain to her grandsire her meeting with Cesare as if it were the most trivial matter under the sun. But the spark of jealousy had been struck in Carlo's soul. He saw more than his uncle saw. And when they were outside again he taxed his companion with it.

"Hast said aught of love to that girl, my friend?" he asked.

"What is that to thee?" retorted Cesare, all his pride of family in a flame.

"Good, or rather bad!" replied the other. "It makes things simpler, though it will mean the saying of more masses."

There were few words exchanged between the two young men that day. Late in the evening, however, Carlo, who had become saturnine in the extreme, called Cesare to the door.

"Let us talk," he said, "under the chestnut tree. There is a moon. You will not want a gun."

"I trust you," replied Cesare, and together they went out.

Then, with a numbed heart, Cesare listened to Carlo's cold-blooded plan for the shooting of his own uncle. The old man went out every day to see to his goats. They were to follow him by stealth the next morning. The rest would be easy.

"And afterwards?" suggested Cesare, almost trembling. His thoughts were with Caterina.

"Afterwards—we will see," responded Carlo, and his thoughts also were with Caterina.

They returned to the house in silence, and in silence each went to bed.

The morning opened with mist and rain. But that was nothing. They were used to both in the Corsican highlands. Neither deterred old Giovanni from seeking his goats, gun in hand. And neither kept the two lads from getting on his track and following him over the slippery rocks and wet grass until the opportunity presented itself.

They were close on his heels at length. He had stopped to light his pipe, with his back to them. Carlo gently touched his companion on the shoulder, pointed, and whispered:

"Behold your quarry!"

No shot could have been simpler. In one instant Cesare had his gun extended, and the next the rocks echoed with the report, and old Leonetti lay on his face, shot through the heart.

"Let us see how it has gone," said Carlo quietly.

They turned the old man over. He was dead as Julius Cæsar.

Thrilled with a demoniacal sense of elation, Cesare now offered his hand to his friend—to have it rejected with such scorn as few but Corsicans can express by word and look. Carlo was a-boil with passion—for his family's and his own sake.

"That is over," he said hoarsely, referring to their recent friendship. "There is no feud in all Corsica more mortal than ours. Load thy gun."

"But, Carlo——" began the poor lad.

"But nothing. I owe a life for this here—" pointing to his uncle's body—"and another for thy insolence in forestalling me with—with her."

Then Cesare understood. The pride of the Forli was a good match for the pride of the Leonetti.

Without another word the lad reloaded.

"Ten paces will do," said Carlo; "the signal shall be the croaking of the first raven after we are in station."

These were the last words they exchanged.

For nearly a minute they stood, each with gun leveled at the other's forehead. There was a raven hard by on a withered pine trunk, but it kept deathly silence for full fifty seconds. At last it croaked.

MR. GEORGE GRIFFITH'S NEW SERIAL STORY,

which commences in PEARSON'S WEEKLY published on JANUARY 26th, is called

VALDAR THE OFT-BORN:

A Saga of Seven Ages.

In this romance the author has forsaken those fields of the future over which the air-ships of "The Angel," "The Syren," and "The Outlaws" sped upon their devastating errands, and will transport his readers far back into the past ages of the world's history. In the forgotten days of the Golden Age, and in Asgard of the Gods within the vanished Polar Paradise, the action will commence, and from hence the hero will set out upon those strange wanderings which will lead him through many and marvellous vicissitudes on to the tremendous stage on which, at the beginning of the present century, the destinies of the world were shaped anew.

He will visit lands whose names are almost forgotten, and cities whose sites are now only marked by their ruins. Through the chapters of the story the greatest world characters will pass in swift and brilliant array. Battles which have decided the fate of empires and races will be fought out anew, not by the puppets of the schoolmen's histories, but by the living, breathing characters, whom the magic of romance will recall from their graves. As the story of each of the seven great ages of the world is told, those who during it made or marred the fate of humanity will come back out of the shadows and work out their appointed destiny, fighting and scheming, winning and losing, loving and hating, just as they did while their names were yet words of terror upon earth; and through all the changing scenes, the splendours of peace, and the sterner glories of battle, the hero will move, the one enduring figure of them all, accompanied by her who, for love of him, has elected to share his fate, to the accomplishment of his predestined doom, and the end of his marvellous pilgrimage.

Thus VALDAR THE OFT-BORN will be a story of love and war, of empire-making and empire-breaking in many ages and climes, all linked together in the weirdly drawn and yet perfectly human personalities of the two principal actors in the drama, and those who follow them through all their swiftly changing fortunes will, I think, have good reason to believe with me that the author displays no less skill in recalling the real glories of the past than he has done in portraying the ideal splendours and terrors of that future which he predicted in his previous works.

Mr. Griffith writes exclusively for *Short Stories* and *Pearson's Weekly*, and his previous novels have been so well received by my readers that I am sure they will look forward to VALDAR THE OFT-BORN with a good deal of interest. It is to those who have not yet read any of his romances I wish to appeal. Let them but read the opening chapters of this fascinating story, and I can promise them an intellectual treat.

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THE OUTLAWS OF THE AIR.

By George Griffith,

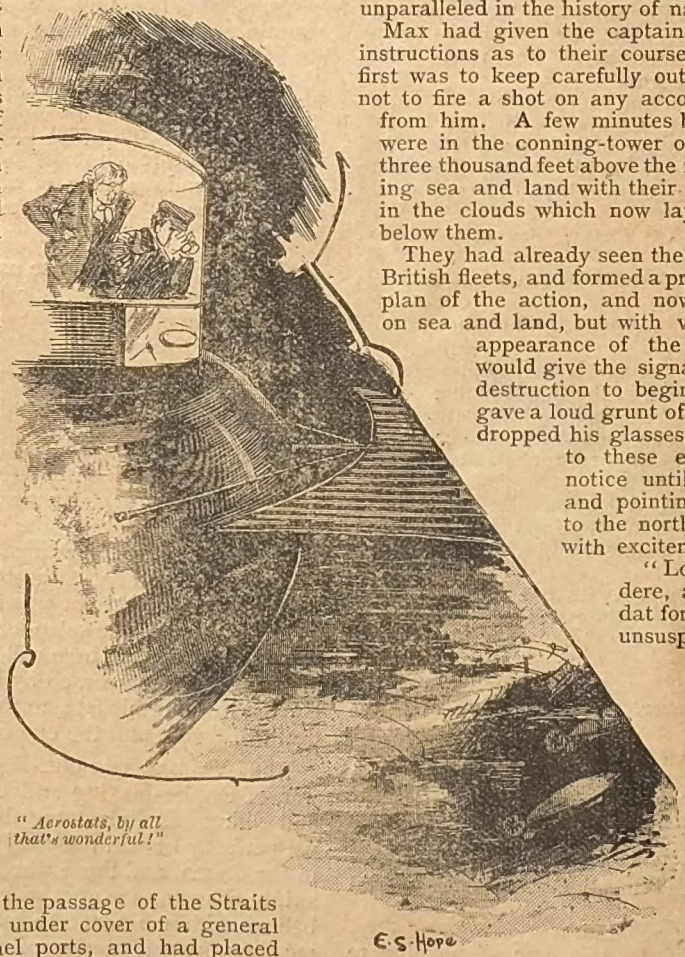
Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "The Syren of the Skies," etc.

CHAPTER XLI.

The Battle of the Sound.

As it was extremely unlikely that the Russian fleet would attempt to break the blockade of the Sound until it had the advantage of the darkness, Max decided to economise his motor fuel, and keep a speed of only fifty miles an hour across the German ocean. It was, therefore, close on eleven o'clock at night when the fleet arrived over what was to be the scene of action.

It was a dark, moonless, and somewhat cloudy night, but, as the ships sank through the clouds, their crews could distinctly make out the two irregular shores of the Sound, with their twinkling lights and the illuminated clusters which mark the position of the towns along them. To the north of Kronborg, in the triangular opening between Högenaes on the Swedish and Gilleleie on the Danish shore, was massed the main body of the British fleet.



"Aerostats, by all that's wonderful!"

Although Germany and Denmark had not yet declared war their governments had intimated to Russia that any attempt to violate the neutrality of the Sound, or to force the passages between the southern islands of Denmark would be considered as an act of war. The southern approaches to the exits from the Baltic were, therefore, patrolled by a powerful German fleet with Kiel and the Holstein Canal as its base, while the Danish fleet, supported by the land fortifications, barred the way to the Sound, and the Grön Sound, which forms the channel between the islands of Falster and Zealand, and the entrance to the Great Belt.

Thus the Russian fleet, strong as it was, would have been hopelessly outnumbered but for two facts. A French squadron of eight battle-ships, sixteen cruisers, and thirty-five torpedo boats had forced the passage of the Straits of Dover four days previously, under cover of a general attack on the English Channel ports, and had placed the British blockading squadron between two fires, just as the Russians would be if they once steamed into the Sound.

This was the first fact, and was by this time known to all Europe. The second fact had been kept a profound secret, confined to the Tsar and half a dozen of his most trusted engineers, who commanded a body of a hundred picked volunteers, sworn to secrecy, and chosen exclusively from the noblest families of Russia. For over five years the Russian engineering staff had been steadily experimenting in the directions of a solution of the problem of aerostation, and about six months before the outbreak of the war their efforts had been crowned with success, and a fleet of navigable aerostats had been secretly constructed far away from public observation, on one of the Tsar's private estates in the wilderness of the Urals.

The inactivity on the part of the Russian fleet in the Baltic, which had excited so much surprise, was in reality due to the necessity of waiting until the aerostats could co-operate with the battleships in forcing the passage of the Sound. No fewer than a hundred of these new engines of war had been built by the Russian Government, and fifty of them were to take part in the struggle for the command of the narrow sea, a battle which, as the event proved, was destined to be entirely unparalleled in the history of naval warfare.

Max had given the captain of his fleet strict and ample instructions as to their course of action, and of these the first was to keep carefully out of sight until night fell, and not to fire a shot on any account until he received a signal from him. A few minutes before eleven, Max and Hartog were in the conning-tower of the *Revanche*, floating about three thousand feet above the island of Moen, intently watching sea and land with their glasses through the white rifts in the clouds which now lay some five or six hundred feet below them.

They had already seen the French, German, Danish, and British fleets, and formed a pretty correct idea of the general plan of the action, and now they were waiting, like those on sea and land, but with very different feelings, for the appearance of the Russian fleet, whose arrival would give the signal for the work of death and destruction to begin. All of a sudden Hartog gave a loud grunt of astonishment, and very nearly dropped his glasses. Max, who was accustomed to these exclamations of his, took no notice until he caught him by the arm, and pointing down to a rift in the clouds to the northward, said in a voice husky with excitement:

"Look, mine friendt, look down dere, and tell me vhat you tink of dat for a nice trick to blay on dose unsuspecting sailors and soldiers vat are vaiting to plow each oder to pieces mit all the resources of Christianity and civilisation. By tam! I believe dose tings belong to de Russians, and if dey do dere will be der tuefel's own delight down dere before de sun rises."

Max looked down, and to his amazement saw three great elongated, cigar-shaped bodies drifting rapidly through the air to northward over the waters of the Sound.

"Aerostats, by all that's wonderful!" he ejaculated. "And pretty lively ones too at that. Those fellows aren't moving much less than fifty miles an hour, and what wind there is is against them. Yes, I remember now, Lea told me only the other day that she had heard rumours that the Tsar's engineers had succeeded in building some of those things in some out-of-the-way place and hoped to be able to use them in the war. Well, if they do belong to the Tsar, and he has a good few of them about, I hardly think there'll be much need for our assistance for some time yet. They'll smash one another up pretty completely without us."

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"And den—" chuckled Hartog, rubbing his hands in anticipation of a perfect carnival of bloodshed—"den ven dey are all smashed ve can sail in and go for de remains, and den tackle de var balloons and bust dem up as vell. Mein Gott, dat vill be glorious fun!"

"I don't see why we should smash up the war-balloons, at any rate just yet," said Max quietly. "Just think of the damage they are able to do to those who are our enemies just as well as theirs. Of course I don't suppose they'd be any match for us, for we could fly two or three feet to their one, but for land and sea warfare they'll be better than anything the British or Germans have got. I think we'd better see what damage they can do before we interfere with them. It all helps on the good work of Anarchy you know. The more horrible war becomes the sooner the peoples of the earth will get disgusted with the rulers and politicians who are always dragging them into it. Let them do what destruction they can manage, and then we'll go in and finish."

"Max," said Hartog, in a tone of sententious mock reproof, "I am afraidt you haf very bloodtirsty tastes. I tink it vould be a fery great slaughter dat vould satisfy you."

"Yes," said Max, with a savage laugh, "a very big one; but look, there goes the main fleet! The first three we saw were only scouts, I suppose. I don't think it will be long now before the fun begins."

The rift in the clouds had widened now, and through it they saw a long line of the strange-looking shapes, curved in the form of a crescent, drift swiftly to the north, where the unsuspecting fleets and fortresses were waiting for a very different and far less formidable enemy.

"I hope our fellows won't take it into their heads to fire at those aerostats," continued Max. "That would spoil all the fun. I wish those clouds were a bit thicker, and I'd take the risk of signalling them."

"Vy not hoist a vite flag instead of de red one," suggested Hartog, "and then fly along past dem? Dey vill understand dat after your oder instructions."

"Yes, that's not a bad idea," said Max. "We'll try that."

Ten minutes later the *Revanche* had ascended a few hundred feet and passed along the long line of air-ships which extended north and south. At the southern end towards Fehmern Island, at the entrance to Kiel Bay, one of the ships stationed there ran alongside her. When they were within hail a slide was drawn back in her conning-tower, and her captain called to Max and asked him if he had seen the aerostats. Then, on learning that he had, he told him that another squadron had passed under him into the Bay apparently heading for Kiel.

"All right," replied Max.

"I suppose you understand what the white flag means?"

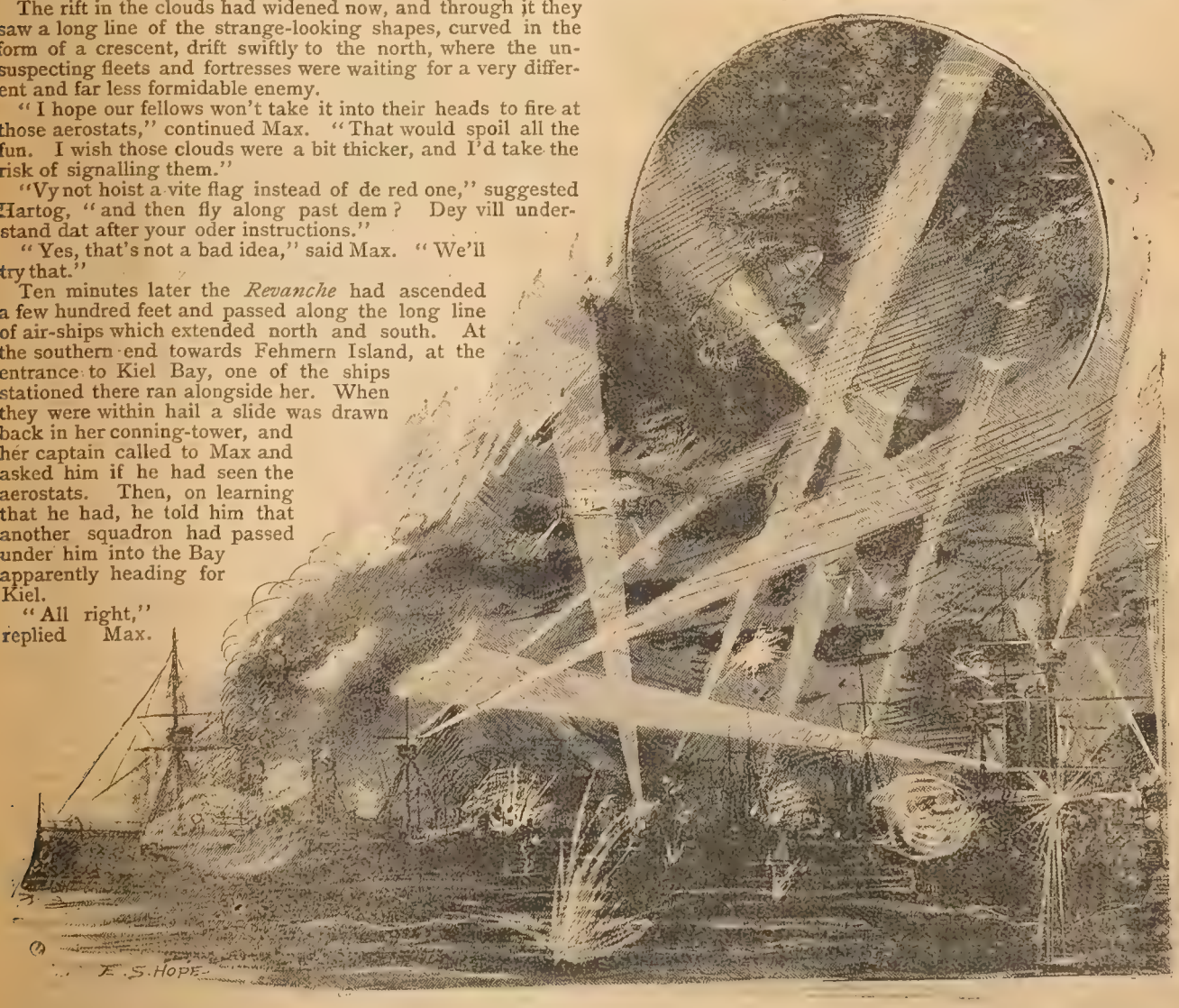
"Oh yes; you don't want us to do anything until they have got to work," was the reply. "I suppose you'll give the signal when you want us to start?"

"Yes, I'll fire the first gun. If you have nothing better to do, you may as well run along and speak the other ships, and tell them not to fire until I do, and to be careful of the ammunition, and to see that every shot does its work. I'm going to look for the Russian fleet now."

Max nodded to the captain of the *Ravachol*—for all the vessels of the Anarchist fleet, saving the *Revanche* and the captured *Vengeur*, had been named after the so-called heroes and martyrs of Anarchy—and then the flag-ship, once more flying the red flag, flew at a rapid pace toward the eastward. After half an hour's flight, during which they gradually descended to fifteen hundred feet, Max pointed ahead and said to Hartog:

"There they are, and a rare old crowd of them too! Why there must be over a hundred of them altogether."

"Jah, dat is so; and vat for a smoke and sparks dey are making. Dey will be going full speed now mit der forced draughts. Dey vill vait for der aerostats to make tings all anyhow in de Sound, and den make a rush to get trough. I tink ve had better go back or ve shall miss some of de fun."



A strange and terrible scene it was.

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"Yes," said Max, swinging the *Revanche's* head round, "I suppose we had. The bombs will be beginning to fly by this time. I am rather curious to see how those things do their work."

In an hour the *Revanche* was over the scene of action, and a strange and terrible scene it was. The aerostats had dropped to a height of a thousand feet above the fortifications of Elsinore and the Danish ships guarding the Sound, and were raining mélinite and dynamite bombs on them with fearful effect. Search-lights were flashing up from the land and water in all directions seeking the terrible foe, until the whole air was ablaze with them, and those in the forts and on board the ships saw, to their horror, not only the aerostats, but, above them, the more distant shapes of the Anarchist air-ships.

Thousands of projectiles from machine guns were being hurled in showers into the air, but none seemed to strike the rapidly moving aerostats, which were able to dart hither and thither in the almost windless atmosphere at a speed of over fifty miles an hour, so that they swept through the beams of the search-lights and into the darkness again with such bewildering rapidity that it was little better than a waste of ammunition to fire at them.

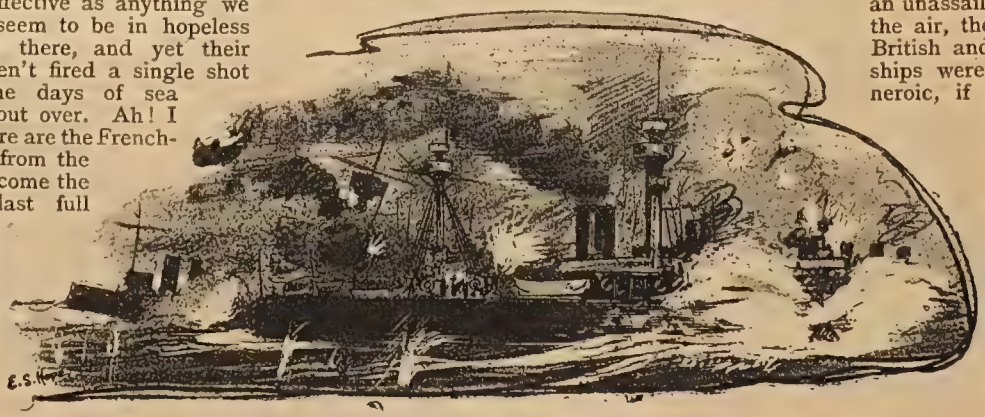
From their great size it was evident they could carry enough ammunition to keep the bombardment up for hours, possibly till daylight, and during all that time the British and Danish fleets and fortresses would be battered into ruins under the falling storm of explosives, and then the untouched Russian fleet would come and make short work of what was left of them.

As for the other fleet, one or two vessels of which were every now and then made visible by some chance ray of the search-lights shooting up through a rift in the clouds, the bewildered defenders of the Sound could make nothing of it beyond the fact that it evidently was not friendly, or it would have engaged the aerostats before they had had time to begin their deadly work.

When the Anarchists, from their unassailable vantage-point, had watched the bombardment for about three hours, they could see that Copenhagen was in flames and Elsinore in ruins; while, from the constant explosions that took place on the water, blazing up like volcanoes for a moment through the darkness, and then dying down into the night again, and from the constantly diminishing number of search-lights that were thrown up against the clouds, it was manifest that terrible execution had been done.

But the merciless destruction was not by any means confined to Danish territory and the Sound, for the air-ships brought up reports from the south to the effect that Kiel had been vigorously bombarded all the time, and was now little better than an area of blazing ruins; while another squadron of aerostats had attacked the German fleet, and not only prevented it getting out of the bay, but had greatly damaged and completely demoralised it into the bargain.

"I told you there would be no need for us to interfere for the present," said Max, who had received the news when the *Revanche* was floating over the Gut of Elsinore. "The organised Anarchy that these good people call war is, after all, nearly as effective as anything we can do. They seem to be in hopeless confusion down there, and yet their heavy guns haven't fired a single shot yet. Verily, the days of sea fighting are about over. Ah! I thought so. There are the Frenchmen closing in from the north, and here come the Russians at last full steam up from the south. I don't think there'll be much of the British fleet left by sunrise."



Through a storm of shot and shell.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE VICTORS VANQUISHED.

THE showers of sparks and plumes of flame now plainly visible north and south clearly proved that Max was right when he said that the French and Russian fleets were closing upon their more than half-disabled enemies. Under the highest speed that their forced draught would give them, the two great squadrons, loaded with potential death and destruction, rapidly converged upon the narrow waters in which the remains of the British and Danish fleets were now imprisoned.

"Ah, jah, now de big guns are beginning to speak!" cried Hartog, as the deep, dull booming of the battleships' artillery rose like distant thunder from the water.

Pale flashes of yellow-white flame streamed through the darkness to north and south of the Gut, to be answered by other flashes from the centre; and these, again, were supplemented by brilliant spheres of light which blazed out for a moment and then vanished, as the bombs from the aerostats fell on the decks of cruisers and battleships, and exploded, spreading death and ruin over them.

"Yes, that's pretty murderous work, considering that it's the latest outcome of nearly two thousand years of Christian civilisation, and the evolution of law and order," said Max, in a half-sneering, half-laughing tone. "Of course, it's fair and honourable warfare, and all that sort of thing, but they seem to mangle each other quite as completely as I smashed up the crowd round Newgate which was waiting to cheer the flag that would tell them that I'd been hanged. Well, it's a queer sort of thing, this civilised human nature, after all."

"Jah, dat is so," grunted Franz, in assent; "ven you burn, sink, and destroy according to de rules of de game, it is all right, and if you do it mitout getting busted up yourself you can get a medal, or a monument, according to de number of people dat you have sent in leetle pieces out of de vorld; but if you do it on your own hook, den you are an Anarchist, and a murderer, and not fit for anyting but hanging or guillotining ven dey catch you at it. It seems someting like de difference between gambling for tousands on a racecourse and tossing for pennies in de street; but, by tam, it is only foolishness, for all dat."

"Yes, that's so," replied Max. "It's all a matter of opinion, and we've as much right to our opinion as Society has to its, especially when we have the power to inforce it, as we happily have. I think we can go a bit lower now. They seem too busy to take very much notice of us, and if they do it doesn't matter."

He sent a signal to the engine-room, and the *Revanche* dropped quietly through the clouds and began to run to and fro, at about forty miles an hour, some five hundred feet above the aerostats, which were now massed over the British and Danish fleets, and were still dropping a ceaseless shower of bombs upon any of the ships which were sufficiently illuminated by the converging search-lights of the French and Russian squadrons to offer a fair mark.

Outnumbered as they were on the water, and attacked from an unassailable position in the air, the sorely-pressed British and Danish battleships were maintaining a heroic, if hopeless, fight, not for any possible advantage, for there was none to be gained; but simply with the object of doing as much damage as possible to their enemies before the inevitable came. Every gun that remained effective was served

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The aerostat exploded like a huge bubble.

and fired with such rapidity and precision that the fighting force of the fleets seemed doubled, and cruiser after cruiser and battleship after battleship, when her guns were no longer serviceable, made a dash with the ram upon the nearest enemy, charging into her through a storm of shot and shell, and either sinking beside her or with her rather than haul down her flag in surrender.

Indeed, so obstinately heroic was the resistance, or rather the dying struggle, of the allied fleets, that not until morning dawned, and the unequal fight had been prolonged for five hours, did the French and Russian fleets find the way of the Sound open, and steamed together southward past the silenced fortifications on land and the crippled and sinking wrecks of the blockading squadrons on sea.

To the south from the direction of the Great Belt and the Bay of Keil the sounds of conflict were still rolling up like peals of distant thunder. A portion of the Russian fleet had been detached, as soon as the defeat of the British and Danish force was assured, to co-operate with the second squadron of aerostats against the German fleet and the fortifications of Kiel. To the north the victory was complete, and so the united fleets, greatly diminished in numbers by the fierce struggle that their triumph had cost, but still in overwhelming strength, steamed south to complete the destruction that the aerostats had begun.

As the light increased a splendid, but what would have been to any other eyes a terrible spectacle, was unfolded before the gaze of the Anarchists, floating high above the smoke and din of the combat. To the south-west the smoke and flames of the burning town and docks and arsenal of Kiel were plainly visible over the low-lying land of Probstei. In the Fehmern Belt and Fehmern Sound one German fleet was making ready to attack the French and Russian squadrons, while to the eastward a second German fleet was coming up under full steam from Stralsund, apparently in the hope of catching the enemy between two fires.

As soon as the reinforcement was sighted the French fleet parted from the Russian and made its way east to intercept it. Meanwhile the aerostats had sunk down alongside a flotilla of transports which had been kept in the wake of the Russian fleet, and were taking in fresh supplies of ammunition. By the time the four fleets were fairly engaged again they mounted slowly into the air, divided into two equal squadrons of twenty-five each, and stationed themselves over the two divisions of the German force.

It was now quite light enough for Max and Hartog to see that the gas-holders of the aerostats, instead of being made of silk or balloon cloth, were really huge cylinders of a white metal, probably very thin sheet aluminium, which glistened with a silvery lustre in the beams of the rising sun, and that their cars, instead of being suspended by ropes, were simply lower compartments of one and the same structure. They also differed in another respect from all previous types of aerostats

Two propellers projected from the stern of the car, and a third and very much larger one revolved on a shaft projecting from the after part of the gas-holder itself. This was obviously an immense improvement on all previous forms, not only as regards speed, but also in stiffness and facility of management. From the jets of white vapour which constantly escaped from the stern of the cars, it was plain that their motive power was derived from steam engines, and as a matter of fact their engines had been designed and built from the published descriptions of those which had been used to propel the Maxim aeroplanes.

As soon as the sun got fairly above the horizon the clouds began to melt away rapidly, and before long the Anarchist fleet was plainly visible to the eyes of the astonished combatants, flying round and round in wide curves at just sufficient speed to keep the vessels supported on the air-planes with the smallest possible expenditure of motive power. They maintained themselves at an almost uniform speed of between forty and fifty miles an hour, and a height that varied from two to three thousand feet, as they alternately sank and soared in their swift and graceful evolutions.

That they had an interest in the combat was manifest from the fact that they remained on the scene of action, but they took no part whatever in the struggle until a signal from the Russian flagship sent three aerostats into the upper regions of the air to investigate.

"Those fellows had better mind their own business," said Max, who still remained with Hartog on the conning-tower of the *Revanche*. "If they come too close, they'll be getting hurt. We'll let them rise a bit further just to satisfy their curiosity, and then if they don't go down again we'll send them down. I wonder how they manage to rise without throwing out any ballast."

"Oh, I tink I can tell you how dat is done," said Hartog. "Dey haf a collapsible air-chamber inside de gas holder. Ven dey vant to go down dey pump air into it, vich is fourteen times heavier dan dere hydrogen, so down they go, and ven dey vant to rise dey draw de air out and den de hydrogen expands and takes its place, getting lighter de more it spreads, and so dey go up. It is very simple ven you know how. But look, von of dose fellows is coming at us as dough he tought he can do us some damage. Maybe he tinks he can fly as fast as ve can. Vill you not show him vat a foolish mistake dat is?"

Instead of replying, Max uttered a short scornful laugh, sent a signal to the engine-room, and then gave some rapid orders down the tubes communicating with the gun-room. The *Revanche* immediately quickened up a little. Max gave the wheel a turn, and brought her stern on to the aerostat which was now almost on a level with her, and about five hundred yards away. Then he took up one of the speaking-tubes and said into it:

"After guns—fire when you're ready," and then he looked back to watch the effect of his order. A minute later the two shells struck the forward part of the car, close under the gasholder of the aerostat, almost simultaneously, and burst.

The aerostat exploded like a huge bubble in the midst of a momentary mist of flame. Her car, with its cargo and machinery, plunged downwards into the water from a height of nearly two thousand feet, just missing one of the Russian battleships, and that was the end of her. The other two

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"*Your fellows don't fight so well as the British.*'

needed no second hint not to continue the investigation. They sank rapidly on a slanting course towards where the French and German fleets were now hotly engaged, leaving the Anarchists in undisputed possession of the upper regions of the air.

"Dot vill be a nice little surprise for dem," chuckled Hartog, as he watched the fearful effects of the two shells. "I suppose dey tought ve came here just to see de fun as ve might haf come to a circus, and so dey came to say goot morning to us. Perhaps dey vill attend more strictly to pusiness now."

"Yes," said Max, with something like a snarl, as though the fate of the aerostat had whetted his appetite for destruction. "We'll give them business when they've crippled each other a bit more. Those poor beggars of Germans are making a precious poor show against their new enemies of the air. Your fellows don't fight as well as the British did, Franz."

"No, dey don't," snapped Hartog savagely. "Mein Gott, I am ashamed of dem! Dey seems to tink dey are at a review. If I was only down dere in my old *Destroyer* I vould show dem vat proper fighting is."

"Until you got a shell on top of you from one of those aerostats," laughed Max, "and then you'd wish you were up here again I think."

"Ach, Himmel, jah! I forgot dat. No; sea fighting is no good mit air-ships. It is not a fair game, unless you happen to be in de air-ship. But don't you tink it's about time for us to join in de fun, friendt Max? Look, dey haf half crippled each oder all ready."

This was true, for ever since daybreak the fighting had been fast and furious between the fleets, and the aerostats had been discharging their fresh cargoes of bombs upon the German vessels with fearful effect. Their fire was visibly slackening, and each of their squadrons had lost at least a dozen battleships and cruisers, which had either been blown up by the bombs from the air or been sunk by torpedoes.

The French and Russian loss had also been fairly heavy, for, despite Max's characteristically French sneer, the Germans had fought their ships splendidly, considering the fearful disadvantage at which they were placed by the assault of the aerostats. At length Max, tired of watching in inactivity, yielded to Hartog's persuasions and his own inbred love of destruction, and flew from the flagstaff of the *Revanche* the signal which, according to the Anarchist code, meant: "Fleet to engage. Destroy everything."

The captains of the air-ships went to work in obedience to the signal with a business-like alacrity which proved how impatiently they had been waiting to take their share in the work of destruction. Max had reconsidered his decision as to the aerostats, and therefore had included them in the general order. In the first place, he felt it very unlikely that they would be the only vessels of the kind in the possession of the Russians, and secondly, he thought that it would not be safe to leave too great a destructive power at the disposal of Society.

The *Revanche* devoted herself exclusively for the time being to the aerostats, and almost as fast as her guns could be loaded and fired the well-aimed shells struck the huge gas-holders which offered such a splendid mark for the gunners. The impact of the shells pierced the thin metal envelope, and, as the hydrogen rushed out to mix with the air, the explosion ignited it, rending the envelope to fragments with a shock that shook the air for a hundred yards about it, and sending the car, with its crew and cargo, plunging headlong into the depths below.

The crews of the war-ships looked upwards in wondering dismay at the marvellous spectacle presented by the two contending aerial fleets, the aerostats vainly trying to outsoar or escape from the guns of their agile enemies, and ever and anon bursting with a flash and a bang, like gigantic shells, as the fatal missiles struck them, while the air-ships, like gigantic birds of prey, outsoared and outflew them, sweeping hither and thither in bewilderingly rapid curves, and then stopping for a moment or two to send their terrible shells home.

In less than an hour the marvellous but unequal battle was over, and the remains of the last aerostat had plunged in fragments into the sea. No fewer than five of them, deliberately driven by the Anarchists over the fleets, had fallen amongst them, exploding their cargoes of bombs in their midst, wrecking the helpless battleships and cruisers, and blowing the torpedo boats and catchers into atoms.

At first the Germans had thought that the air-ships were the British craft belonging to the Syndicate about which so many rumours had been flying through the Continent; but, as soon as the last aerostat had been destroyed, they were speedily undeceived, for the Anarchists now went to work with terrible effectiveness on French, Germans, and Russians alike. The war-ships, already half-crippled in their struggle with each other, fell an easy and a helpless prey to the twenty-one aerial cruisers which, from their unassailable altitudes, swept their decks with storms of Maxim bullets followed by showers of shells and bombs charged with Anarchite and fire-mixture.

By mid-day, out of the four great fleets, only six battleships and four cruisers remained afloat. Of the lighter craft, not one had escaped, and of the big ships that remained floating more than half the crews had been killed, the guns were useless, the engines crippled, and the ships themselves were only kept afloat by their water-tight compartments. And so ended the great Battle of the Baltic—in the indiscriminate destruction of victors and vanquished by the common enemy of them both.

"Dat is about de most unprofitable sea-fight vatever vas fought I should tink," chuckled Hartog, as Max flew the signal to cease firing. "I suppose you vill leave dose fellows to get home as best dey can, and tell de story for de edification of Europe?"

"Yes," said Max, "we shall produce the best effects that way I think, and they certainly aren't worth wasting more ammunition on now."

(To be continued.)

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THE TURNING OF THE WORM

JOHN ROGERS looked impatiently at the clock. He had waited now exactly half-an-hour, and was beginning to get a little restless. "Half-past ten is a pretty hour to go to a party!" he murmured to himself. He began to walk up and down the floor, and then stopped suddenly as he heard a light step on the stairs. He moved towards the door, but the light faded from his face as a trim maid entered, bearing a great bunch of yellow roses in her hand.

"Pardon, monsieur," she said, "but mam'selle says it is impossible that she should wear yellow roses."

He looked at her blankly.

"She wants you to change them—it is the pink rose that mam'selle prefers to-night."

"Oh, she wants pink roses, does she? Well, I'd like to know where I can get any at this time of night."

"The florist's is two corners off, if monsieur will go, and it is La France roses that mam'selle must have to-night, and she will be quite ready on the return of monsieur."

So John Rogers took his yellow roses and bundled into his carriage, not in the most amiable frame of mind. All his annoyance disappeared, however, when he came back and found that Miss Cora Fenton was indeed ready. She stood in the drawing-room pulling on her long gloves—a vision of rosy loveliness. Her white neck and arms rose out of a pink fleecy cloud, and dazzled him.

"Such a shame to keep you waiting," she said, "but I never had such a miserable time getting into my clothes before. Everything seemed bewitched, and my hair looks like a fiend's now. I was so sorry about the roses, but you see yourself it would have been enough to give one a headache with yellow roses and this dress."

The maid threw her long cloak round her, and in a few minutes they were seated side by side on their way to Mrs. Dillingham's cotillon.

It was not the first time that John Rogers had been her escort, but he was just beginning to realise how bitter-sweet a pleasure it was. He was an old friend, so old and trusted that often he went with her, as to-night, without a chaperon.

She was "poor Cora Fenton" in this, that although young, beautiful, and an heiress, she was an orphan, and in a certain sense without a home. To be sure, her brother with whom she lived, was devoted to her, but he cared very little for the society which she loved, and his wife was entirely engrossed with the four little children, who seemed to be all babies at once.

Cora felt dimly that it would be a relief to them both if she were married and established in a home of her own, and perhaps it was this very feeling that made her so wilful and hard to please. No girl likes to be driven along the matrimonial path. She prefers to be guided, and by nothing less masterful than fate itself. She knew perfectly well how satisfied everyone would be if she should marry John Rogers, and the thought of their satisfaction irritated her. She wanted to be her own Columbus, and cross an unknown sea, instead of travelling over a well-worn road, with a sign-post at every corner, and dozens of friendly eyes watching her as she went.

The immediate effect of all this was that she was sometimes quite rude and chilling to poor John Rogers. She was dissatisfied with things in general, and, in the slang phrase, she "took it out of him." On this particular evening at Mrs. Dillingham's she seemed more illusive and distant than ever.

John Rogers watched her dancing with other men nearly all the evening, and it was with a feeling of relief that he helped her into the carriage at last and slammed the door behind them.

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself," he said grimly.

"Indeed I have," she answered airily. "I thought it quite the prettiest cotillon this winter. The Dillinghams always do things so well—don't you think so?"

"Yes," he said, feeling that they had not done particularly well for him.

"It was such a pretty idea," she went on, "having those snowball favours of swansdown. But, do you know, they were heavier than lead. I threw one at Will Lawrence, and it nearly knocked off his ear."

"Did it?" he replied, so wearily that she hastened to say: "Do you know, I believe you were bored to death the whole time."

"You know I love to go anywhere with you, Cora, but this is somehow so unsatisfactory." There was a moment's silence, and then he added impetuously: "I want you all to myself, not shared with all those chattering idiots. I said I wouldn't worry you, and I don't mean to, but if you knew how hard this waiting was. But why can't you decide now, Cora? Why can't you tell me to-night? I love you so——"

Her clear laugh interrupted him. "I never heard anything so ridiculous! Proposing in a carriage at two o'clock in the morning. Why, there isn't room to answer in."

"There's room enough to say 'yes.'"

"Don't be ridiculous. You know I like you better than anyone, but I don't want to marry for a long, long time."

They were silent until the carriage stopped, when she sprang quickly out, as if eager to escape. At the door she paused.

"You're going to take me to the Barclays' on Tuesday, aren't you?"

"Yes, I expected to. Is your sister going?"

"Yes, she and Charlie too. You won't forget?"

So, with the cheerful prospect before him of repeating his evening's experiences, he drove home alone. He remarked to himself several times that he was a fool, and he felt quite sure of it the night at the Barclays' dance. He had been "flocking by himself" for some time, and wondering why on earth he allowed Cora to drag him to these ghastly entertainments. He was standing by a screen of palms, when he suddenly became conscious of voices on the other side of it.

"There is no chance that you should ever think differently!" a man's voice was saying.

"I think not," answered the girl, gently and softly.

John Roger's heat leaped within him, for it was Cora's voice. He knew he ought not to listen, knew that he ought to walk promptly in an opposite direction—but—but—here was another man proposing to *his* Cora.

"Of course," the man's voice said humbly, "if there is someone else——" he hesitated, and there was a little silence.

"There *is* someone else," said Cora, in a very low voice that trembled slightly. "I have always thought the least a girl could do was to be perfectly frank and honest, and so I will trust you—I will tell you. We are not engaged, and I have treated him very badly, but—it is John Rogers. I think I have always cared more for him than for anyone. Oh, I am so sorry!" she added impulsively.

Just then there was the hum of other voices, and they moved away, or were silent, for John Rogers could not hear them any more.

He stood for a moment, dazed and blinded by his happiness. Cora's low broken words were ringing in his ears. He came

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out of his corner with such a beaming face, and his spirits were so high for the rest of the evening, that several of his partners had doubts as to his sobriety. It seemed as if he could not wait to see Cora alone. Her brother and sister were in the carriage driving home, but he contrived to find Cora's hand, and to press it hard. To his surprise she drew it quickly away.

"May I come to see you in the morning?" he asked at the door.

"In the *morning*?" she questioned, with a puzzled look.

"Yes, I *must* see you. I cannot possibly wait."

Cora kept him waiting a long time next morning, and when she finally appeared, looking very lovely in her morning dress, she seemed entirely oblivious of her confession and his happiness.

"I was in the hall behind the palms, Cora, last night. I don't know who he was. I don't want to know; but I heard you tell him—oh, Cora—I heard you tell him that you cared for me." His voice sank almost to a whisper, and his face was quivering with the intensity of his feeling.

A deep wave of colour swept over the girl's face. Then she grew very pale, and it seemed as if her whole attitude toward him stiffened and hardened. "May I ask," she said, "if it is your habit to go round listening to conversation that is intended for other people?"

"I know it was wrong," he answered, in a troubled, humble way; "but, Cora, I heard him speak before I had a chance to get away, and then, oh, Cora, it was so sweet to hear your answer."

He looked at her imploringly, but there was no relenting in her face or manner.

"I think it was, to say the least, a most ungentlemanly thing to do. However, since you *did* see fit to listen, I cannot possibly understand how you could twist the conversation into any reference to you whatever."

He seemed bewildered. "Why, you said——" he began.

"I said," she interrupted calmly, "that I cared for someone else. If you, in your vanity and complacency, think I meant you, I cannot help it."

"And you meant *nothing*! Oh, Cora, I can't believe it! I have been so happy. I thought that at last you knew your heart, and now it is a thousand times worse than ever!"

"I am very sorry for your misunderstanding," she said, coldly; "but really if people *will* listen——" she stopped abruptly, struck by the dumb despair in his face. "Don't let's talk about it any more," she said, in a kinder tone. "You dine with us to-morrow, you know—New Year's Day."

"I shall never dine here again," he answered grimly; "I am a worm of the dust before you. You are as cold and heartless as a stone image. At times I hate you. If you were only honest, if you would only tell me frankly that you cared nothing for me, why, I'd crawl away and try to get over it somehow. But you are a flirt; you are not true. You give me a little hope and then grow more distant than ever. You are a thorough flirt—a woman without a soul!"

Cora Fenton trembled a little at this arraignment, but her voice was steady as she answered: "If this be so, I advise you to have nothing more to do with me. It is easy to leave me, and I shall not follow you."

They eyed each other fixedly, measuring their strength. Then the man quailed. "It's no use," he said miserably. "What do you want me to do?"

"Behave like a sane person in general, and come to dinner to-morrow in particular."

"And then?"

"Oh, John, how can I tell?" She looked at him appealingly, and put a little white hand on his arm. She had conquered. She could afford to be generous. "You know you are the dearest friend I have," she continued, in a soft, caressing voice. "It nearly kills me when you talk to me like that. I *do* care for you, truly, honestly—only I cannot tell yet. How is a girl to know? I am *not* a flirt. I like to have a good time, and to have attention—what girl doesn't? But I hate to have you feel so. Cheer up. Perhaps it will all come out right yet." And she looked at him shyly and sweetly.

"Well," he said gloomily, "perhaps it will."

"And you will come to dinner to-morrow?"

"I suppose so; although it seems such a farce."

"Well, that won't affect the menu, and—we all want you, John!"

And so the worm, having been well trodden upon, crawled off to prepare for the New Year. But he was very unhappy.

He remained in his own room that evening restless and uneasy. He lighted a number of cigars, which he allowed to go out, and then tried to read. Finally, he found a volume that interested him, slightly at first, and then more deeply, till pushing all the other books and papers aside he read on into the night. It struck him simply as the truthful story of a woman's heart, the book being a masterpiece of Balzac's.

"By George!" he exclaimed, throwing the book from him and walking up and down the room; "that's the way to treat such a woman!"

Then he thought of Cora, and the little fire of resentment that had burned in his heart ever since parting from her suddenly glowed afresh. He thought a long time, and when he finally put out his light, and went to sleep, he was a different John Rogers from the disheartened fellow he had been all day. Determination had taken the place of endurance; long-suffering had ended in resolution. It would have disturbed Miss Cora Fenton's dreams had she known that the worm had made up its mind to turn.

New Year's Day dawned with a sharp frost, a gleam of sunshine on the icicles and a hint of snow in the air.

It was just the day for a drive, and Cora Fenton, although a little surprised, was delighted when John Rogers came for her in the afternoon. His pretty turn-out stood waiting at the door, while his prettier horse pawed the snow, and shook his head as if impatient to be off.

"I shall be glad to go," said Cora graciously. "All houses seem stuffy such a day as this. You're not going far?"

"That depends," he answered smilingly. "We'll come home whenever you say the word."

She looked at him, and was suddenly struck by the fact that he was a very handsome man, tall and straight, with broad shoulders, and such a kind, good face. But to-day it seemed to Cora that his honest eyes were a deeper blue than usual, and she had never before noticed how firm and strong the lines of his mouth were, half hidden under his brown beard. She was unusually light-hearted, and chattered gaily as they drove along.

Everybody they met seemed smiling and happy, and the drive was so pleasant that it was with a feeling of regret Cora finally said:

"Oughtn't we to turn round now? I've lost all track of time."

"I don't think we'd better turn," he answered steadily, "until I have asked you a few questions and you have answered them."

Something in his voice surprised her. She looked at him in amazement.

"I want to know," he continued, in a low tone, "if you have made up your mind to marry me."

"Why, John," she said uneasily, "how queer you are! Everything has been so nice and pleasant, and now you must needs go and rake up that old subject."

There was a cold gleam in his eye that she didn't like. She watched him for a moment in troubled silence. Then she added:

"I've told you over and over again that I didn't know how much—I cared."

"Well," he said quietly, "I propose to drive until you find out."

"What?"

"Just that. You will have to know your own mind to-day. You can take all the time you want, and I won't interrupt you while you think."

"Why, John!" she exclaimed. "You're perfectly mad! Take me home at once! I never heard of such a thing. Take me home—or I'll—I'll jump out."

He put his hand on her arm, and held her firmly. "Look here, Cora," he said quietly, "you can't jump out. Of course

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you can scream, if you want to, and attract attention, but you know well enough that that means publicity, and perhaps notoriety. You know that you can trust me, Cora. I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head, but to-day you've *got* to answer me."

"How long are you going to drive?" she asked indignantly.

"Until you answer."

"But if I don't?"

"Oh, you will before to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning!" she gasped.

"Yes," he said calmly; "it's going to be a beautiful moonlight night. I've got plenty of wraps and robes. I see no reason why we shouldn't drive all night."

"I don't believe you," she cried; "you're not in earnest."

He turned to look at her squarely. "You're very much mistaken if you think this is a joke," he said soberly. "I never was more serious in my life."

"And do you think this is a manly, honourable way to act? Do you think a *gentleman* would steal a helpless girl like this, and run off with her? I call it mean and contemptible," and her eyes flashed at him.

"You are mistaken, Cora," he said, in the same even tone; "I am not running away with you at all. It is in your power to make me turn round this minute. I want you to say 'John Rogers, I love you, and I will marry you,' or, if you cannot say that, look me in the face and say, 'I do not love you, and never want to see you again,' and in either case I will turn instantly and take you home. One or the other you *shall* say before you leave this cart."

She began to cry. "Very well," she said, between her sobs, "if you are so anxious to hear it I'll say it. John Rogers, I cannot bear the sight of you. There!"

"I didn't tell you to say that, and, besides, you never looked me in the face."

"I will."

"Very well, do."

She raised her tearful eyes to his, and began, bravely enough: "John Rogers, I do not l——" and then she faltered, and turned her head away.

"You do not *dare* to say it," he cried triumphantly.

She was silent.

"Oh, Cora," he pleaded, "why won't you yield? I know you love me. I have felt sure of it ever since that night at the Barclays'. Nothing you said has really shaken my faith in it. Why, I heard you say so, dear. Say it again, darling, and make me happy for ever."

But she did not answer, and they drove on in silence.

"Are we far from home?" she asked, in a choked voice.

"About fifteen miles, I should say."

"They will wonder what has become of us."

"Yes," he assented, "they will."

"Don't you think this is very unfair—very ungenerous?"

"No; not when I consider the woman I am dealing with."

There was another long pause.

"Are you very sure you care for me, John?"

"Sure! Good Heavens! Why, Cora, I haven't had a thought but for you for years. I haven't been able to work, to think, or to do anything. You've just filled the world for me, Cora."

"Well," she said hesitatingly, "I don't like this trick of yours at all; I think it's horrid; but I—I will, John—there! are you satisfied?"

He dropped the reins and put his arms round her.

"My darling," he began, but she struggled away from him and cried:

"You said you'd turn round!"

A little chilled in his rapture, he turned his horse. Then he looked at her. She was very pretty in the dim light. Her eyes were shining, and in the gathering twilight he could still see the clear bright colour in her cheeks.

"Oh, Cora," he exclaimed, "I think I am the happiest man on earth!"

She looked at him archly.

"I have said I would marry you, John, because you made me, but I didn't say *when*. It won't be for a long time yet!"

He felt faint and sick. Was all this struggle for nothing then? She was playing with him again, like a cat with a mouse.

"What do you mean?" he said hoarsely. "Won't you marry me now—soon? I have waited so long."

She smiled and shook her head. "Not for years and years," she said cheerfully.

He drew the horse up so suddenly that it reared and nearly fell over backwards. Then he turned it sharply in the opposite direction. He muttered something under his breath, gave the horse a quick cut with the whip, and off they drove again.

This time there was a long silence. The stars began to come out. They were well out in the country, and could see the lights in the few houses that they passed. They were almost alone upon the road. Now and then a solitary figure passed them.

Cora looked at him furtively, but he never looked at her. His face was fixed and stern, and there were some ugly lines between his eyebrows.

Presently she said, softly, "John."

At first he paid no attention, but when she repeated his name he answered sharply, "What?"

"John," she said timidly, "isn't it very late? What time is it?"

He pulled out his watch and tried to look at it, but the moon was not yet bright enough. Then he lighted a match, which went out. The second was more successful. "It's a quarter past eight," he said at last.

"Oh, what will Charlie and Nettie think?" she said, with a little sob. "It's long past dinner time."

He made no answer.

"And it's New Year's Day, too," she added, tremulously.

"Yes," he said.

Presently she spoke again. "John, don't look like that! Don't, don't! I cannot bear it! I will promise you anything, John—*anything*!"

"I couldn't trust you if you did."

She cried softly to herself for a few minutes. Then she said in a low voice, leaning towards him a little as she spoke, "John, I will marry you whenever you want me to."

"I am not sure that I ever want you to," he answered grimly.

She gave a little cry, and turned away from him, and for a long time he heard her stifled sobs. By-and-bye she turned towards him again.

"You are killing me!" she said, and she gave one last look at his stern set face. He looked at her in return, unmoved and unrelenting. Then, with a little quivering sob, she put both arms round his neck and kissed him full upon his lips. "Oh, John," she said, "I love you—love you, with all my heart!"

He believed her then, and gathered her to him, and she was calmed and comforted. He was not elated because he had conquered, only joyfully happy, because at last he had secured her; but she knew that she had been vanquished by something stronger than anything within her, and in her heart she rejoiced over her defeat.

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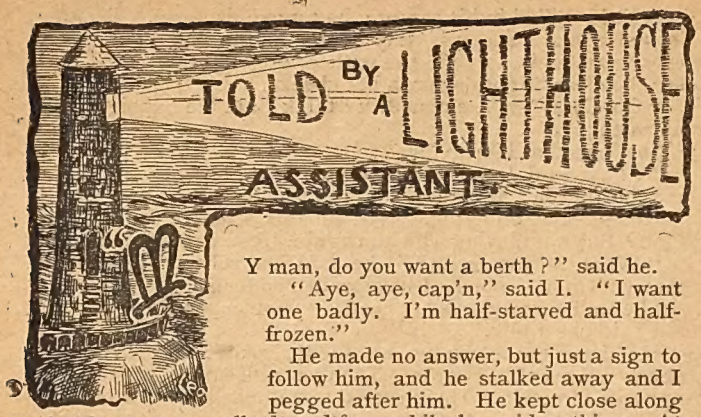

Y man, do you want a berth?" said he.

"Aye, aye, cap'n," said I. "I want one badly. I'm half-starved and half-frozen."

He made no answer, but just a sign to follow him, and he stalked away and I pegged after him. He kept close along the shore as we walked, and for a while he said nothing. At last, however, he turned and pointed seaward.

"You see that?" he asked.

He indicated a lighthouse on a lonely rock.

"I'm the keeper," said he. "I want you to cook my meals and keep my bachelor's hall for me. Now and then I shall want you to row in and buy provisions. The work won't be hard. I think the pay will suit you. Do you know why I chose you?"

"No, cap'n," said I.

"Because I saw that hope was at an end with you," he said. "It is only a man who has come to that who could live with me in a lighthouse."

"I was on a desert island once," said I. "After that I shan't be afraid of a lighthouse."

I'd been in a lighthouse before; it was no new thing to me, but after I'd been there a few hours I wondered what my master hired me for. It was like being pensioned off; there was nothing to do. But, mark ye, when night came on, and the wind began to moan about the lighthouse, and the lamps were lit and all outside was black as pitch, and all the sound we heard was the swash, swash, swash, of the waves, my master mixed some grog and called me to sit along with him. That looked sociable, but I can't say he did. He sat glowering over his glass for a while, and opening his mouth as if to speak, and shutting it again. Then said he:

"What's your name?"

"Ben Dare," said I.

"Would you mind calling yourself Brace?" he asked.

"I've no reason to be ashamed of my name," said I.

"Look here," said he, "I am a gentleman born and bred. I never came to earning my living before. I'm ashamed of it. This is what I mean. If any strangers come out here and ask for William Brace, why, you can say you are the man. You claim to be lighthouse-keeper. It's easy. I don't suppose much company will call; but I choose not to see them, if they do. That's what I hired you for."

"Oh," said I.

"You see," said he, "I got this place through a rich man who had influence. Those who gave it to me never saw me. If I die some day, why, here you are in the place. If I go off, and I may, here you are still until then. I'll pay you well, and you know your duties."

"Well, it's shamming,' said I. "But, after all, what does anyone care what my name is, and what shall I call you?"

"Call me nothing," said he. "Call me Captain, as you did when I met you, but never speak of me to any one."

Gentleman or no, he wasn't lazy. He didn't care how he worked. The lamps were as bright as jewels. There wasn't a speck of dirt in the whole tower. But let any boat come nigh us, away he went and hid himself, and came out with a white, scared face and a shaking hand. At night he was afraid to go up to the lamps alone, and he'd look over his shoulder and turn white as we stood together. At last he took a new turn. He stood staring for awhile. Then he spoke to me in a low voice:

"Brace, do you believe in ghosts?"

"I hadn't considered the question," I answered.

"Well," said he, softer than before, "look into that corner," and he pointed. I looked.

"Don't you see anything?" he asked.

"No," said I; "no, cap'n."

"Ah," he muttered, "very well, very well, I'm glad you don't."

But that wasn't nothing to what happened the very next night. We slept in two bunks nigh each other, and naturally, when he woke up with a yell, I woke too. He was shrieking and shaking and wringing his hands.

"The woman! the woman!" he said. "She stood here just now, all red with blood. It dripped down the white ruffles. It dripped on her hands. Stop her! Stop her! She has gone to call them. Stop her! Stop her!"

"Where did she go?" I asked.

He stared at me with his wide-open eyes, all the whites showing, below and above.

"She couldn't have been here," said he. "It was a dream."

"Lord love you—a nightmare," said I.

So we went to sleep again. But I heard of the woman so often after that I grew used to her. The cap'n, as I called him, got to be worse and worse every day. I wanted to go ashore and fetch the doctor, but he wouldn't hear of it. He raved if I tried to leave him.

At last there came a hot night in June. It was burning hot all day, and a dead calm at night. About dark the cap'n went to sleep, and I went and sat where I could see the water and the lights ashore. It was so clear that I could hear the sailors in a Spanish ship moored not far away singing in their foreign lingo. And I was sort of quiet and dreamy like, when something happened that waked me mightily wide and sudden. Something was standing on the steps below me, something white. Something came towards me.

It was a little slender figure, with long hair all about its shoulders. I couldn't see its face. I don't think I really saw it plainly at all. But it went by me so softly while I looked, and I knew it was a woman in a white ruffled gown, and that she had gone to the room where my master lay. I shook too hard for a moment to move; but as soon as I could I started up to go to him. Just then a voice cried:

"Lighthouse, ahoy!"

I answered "Aye, aye," and stopped a bit. Duty first of all things with a sailor.

A boat lay at the foot of the steps, and four men jumped out of it.

"We want William Brace, keeper of this lighthouse," said one, a big man in a linen overcoat.

"I'm one that answers to the name," says I.

He swung a lantern over my face.

"Search the place, my men," said he.

There was no use saying anything, but I did try to stop them.

"I've got a sick friend aloft," says I. "Don't disturb him. I'm afraid the woman will skeer him, he's so low."

"What woman?" said he.

"The one that came aboard with you, sir," said I.

"No woman came with us," he snarled.

"Stand aside. Men do your duty."

They went upstairs. I followed. I saw them walk into the cap'n's room. I heard them cry out and stand still. When I got to the door they stood in a row looking down on the bed. I looked too. Man nor woman couldn't frighten the cap'n more. He was dead.

"What had he done?" I asked the officer.

"Killed his wife," said he, "that's all. No doubt she deserved it; but it's not allowed by law when they do."

"Heaven help him," said I.

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HOW SHOULD STOUT LADIES DRESS?

Some considerable controversy has been going on in one of the American fashion magazines on this subject, started by the threatened inundation of crinolines.

Fancy a fat lady in a crinoline! Or better still, fancy ten fat ladies in ten fat crinolines, with, say, five a side in a none too fat omnibus!

The Yankee humorist says: "A fat lady can beat a fat man; she can stick a stiletto-like pin through her head till it comes out the other side and hold on her bonnet, but the fat man can't." Let's have those ten pins to complete the picture of those ten crinolines. Would we of the sterner sex not like to "lynch" the fiend who invented mountainous hats and feathers for front rows in theatres? Blondin can walk across Niagara on a tight rope, but can he walk a theatre corridor with three ladies' trains in front of him? The fashion miscreant, and the barbed wire inventor, have much to answer for. One fashion paper argues that if the portly lady adds a little slashing of light on a dark backgrouud, artistically and judiciously, it has the effect of *apparently* reducing her size by half a stone. How ludicrous all this seems! What is the seven pounds *imitation* reduction? We have known Mr. Russell, the eminent Specialist on Corpulency, reduce a lady eleven pounds in seven days, and not an *imitation* reduction, but an absolute fact, at a cost of probably less than is paid to the "faking" dressmaker. Those who are acquainted with his methods, or have read his work, "Corpulency and the Cure," can bear us out that he talks with as glib unconcern of fourteen-pound, twenty-eight pound, and even half-hundredweight reductions of unhealthy waste accumulations as a steamboat stoker would talk of coal. The dressmaker simply attempts to hide the disease—creating adipose, carried about by the unfortunate victim to obesity—whereas Mr. Russell (of Woburn House, 27, Store Street, London, W.C.) aims to remove the cause, and thus impart health. Of course, no lady likes the brute of a man who enters into a crusade against tight-lacing in a blunt common-sense way; but he is, however, right when he claims that tight stays with *embonpoint* is suicidal, especially when a few doses of a most pleasant, agreeable, and exhilarating tonic, made entirely from herbs, will reduce one's weight so easily with a corresponding improvement of health and strength, and with it that bright eye and healthy complexion which we all like to see in a lady. If our roof leaks and lets the rain in, we can shelter ourselves from it by opening an umbrella; but if we get the slater to stop the cause, he is the true benefactor, and not the umbrella maker. So it is with the reducer of fat and the dressmaker. The fair sex begin to see that he is their benefactor; he does not ruthlessly rip up the bodice, like uncouth Dr. Abernethy; he is better informed, for he actually knows that in twenty-four hours that identical inimical appendage will be in a state of subjugation. In other words, a dangerously tight lacing on Monday will be slack by Tuesday, after taking three simple doses of his mixture. "Has one to starve one's self?" asked a lady once. Not at all, for it is a singular fact that one eats more under his treatment.

It is perhaps not singular, if we investigate. A fat man is unhealthy; he is, in fact, diseased; as the disease is being cured the organs become healthy, the patient is more buoyant, and takes more exercise, and requires more food (it is also traceable to other reasons without exercise). Then, again, with stilt-like high heels, fashion—well, I think we had better drop this theme, we shall get into hot water with our fair readers; we are married. We generally get the old bachelor-editor to write on these subjects; he is not a bit afraid of women, as he calls them.

But seriously, if any lady, or gentleman, as far as that goes, wishes to reduce their weight, we commend them to Mr. Russell's work, "Corpulency and the Cure," which is published at Woburn House, Store Street, London, W.C., and only costs 4d. in stamps, post free. But to revert to the subject of crinolines, honestly we are pleased to see the really sensible and steadfast way in which ladies have made their standpoint, and we suggest that they should have a medium of their own to rule the fashions to their own liking, and not be the victims of the profit-seeking professional modiste.

DO STOUT PEOPLE LIVE LONG?

This is a question which has occupied the attention of medical authorities from time immemorial. Some argue that the lean kind take longer to shuffle off the mortal coil than their stout brethren. The statistics naturally favour this argument, and no doubt are correct to a great extent, because sufferers from obesity are more susceptible to disease in consequence of the debilitated state of the system when clogged with abnormal adipose tissue; but a curious fact has been overlooked, viz., that corpulency generally commences about the age of thirty-five to fifty, after which time it seems to decrease; therefore, before the proverbial "three score and ten" is reached, the whilom fat man is, by a natural process, again reduced to what may only be called moderate plumpness, and thus cheats the statistician. Stout persons can now, thanks to science, reduce their weight in a most extraordinarily rapid manner, without the slightest injury to their constitutions, or without resorting to those drastic remedies which only operate for a time, or by the continuance of the use of toxical drugs extending over such a period that renders it baneful to the long-suffering patient. An eminent Continental therapeutist recommends the victim to obesity to eat fat meat, while an equally eminent American prescribes lean ditto, and the stomach is to risk an accumulation of serious disorder by swallowing a pint of hot water daily, a most nauseous remedy, we should think, and not unattended with danger. The past master in the cure of corpulence is Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, London, W.C., whose book (256 pages), entitled "Corpulency and the Cure," price only 4 stamps, seems to impress us considerably, for he reduces more weight by his system than the Continental and American physicians, without any of the absurd restriction which would make life scarcely worth living. He uses simple herbs, the properties of which he seems to possess a more than usual knowledge of, and he makes but little secret of his method, so refreshing after the mystery made of most chemical and herbal concoctions of various complaints.—*Wetherby News.*

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WHAT A HOST OF US FEEL THIS WAY.

HALFWAY measures and halfway situations are often more disagreeable than extreme ones. Knowing this from experience, we can the better understand what Mr. James Sutcliffe means when he says that at a certain time in June, 1891, he was "too well to lie up and too ill to be at work." In case one is downright ill and no mistake about it; ill enough to go to bed indefinitely, and to leave everything to others—why, there is a sort of completeness and sincerity in it that brings some consolation. And, to be sure, when one is well and hearty from top to toe; as full of life as an egg is of meat—why, that is a plain, simple, and enjoyable situation. But to be responsible for work without the vim or ability to do it right, or to be ailing without those sharp symptoms that make our friends concerned about us—*that* is a mean, nasty attitude to be in.

Yet as an actual fact the great bulk or proportion of the suffering borne by humanity—physical, mental, and moral suffering—is borne by the very people in this condition, not by those who lie quietly on beds at home or receive intelligent and expert attention in hospitals. There now! We have said it, and it's true.

Mr. Sutcliffe will be understood, therefore, by millions who are in the form he was in; who work away and do their best; who seldom or never grumble; *and yet*—who *need help*, every man and woman of them.

He (Mr. Sutcliffe we mean, of course) says that no terrible pains took him, nothing scaring, nothing that made him send somebody to fetch the doctor, but he just felt bad; low, weary, languid, tired, out of sorts. Dear, dear, what a crowd, what a host, of us there is who can fit every one of those words on himself as though they were coats that had been made to measure. We don't feel like work, we hate to give up—that is where we are; and we should be more grateful, really, for a medicine that would set us right *just now* than we are likely to be for some magic balm which shall bring us back to the world in the hour when its vain sights and shows are fading in the mists of death.

Well, well. Let us hear Mr. Sutcliffe out; he has but a few words to say: "My energy seemed gone out of me. In my mouth there was a bad, sickening taste, worse in the mornings than at other times. I lost all relish for my meals, and what I did eat I ate because we all *do* eat as long as we can, whether we feel like it or not. I was much troubled with flatulence, and in short was too well to lie up and to ill to be at work. In this way I continued about four months; nothing doing me any good. After a while something put it into my mind that maybe Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup might help me. So I began to take it, and in three weeks I felt much better. This gave me reason for keeping on with it, and I did keep on. The result was that my appetite returned and my food agreed with me and did me good. In this way the improvement went on until I was as well as ever, and I have been in the best of health ever since. I know many persons living in Low Moor who have found great benefit from using Seigel's Syrup. (Signed) James Sutcliffe, 110, St. Paul's Street, Low Moor, Clitheroe, December 1st, 1893."

We have no doubt of it, dear Mr. Sutcliffe, no doubt of it at all. People who have found benefit from that medicine are to be come across all over the earth. They speak almost every tongue known to human lips, and the words "Mother Seigel's Syrup" have been translated into every one of them.

And, what is better still, most of them are like you—thankful, not for having been rescued from impending death (although that often happens), but for having been picked up out of the vile middle ground between illness and health, and put where they wanted to be—squarely on their legs, with a relish for their meals and a relish for their work. Good luck to the people of Low Moor.

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